



H1N1 Questions & Answers for Parents of Children in Schools

Since April 2009, the new influenza virus called H1N1 (referred to as “swine flu” early on) has caused illnesses in people throughout North Carolina and the United States. This virus has continued to spread worldwide, in much the same way that other flu viruses spread from person-to-person during coughing or sneezing. In anticipation of more cases of H1N1 influenza occurring in our community and in our schools this fall, please review the following information provided by the Durham County Health Department:

What are the signs and symptoms of this virus?

The symptoms of H1N1 flu are similar to those of seasonal flu (that people get every fall or winter) and include fever (temperature of 100°F [37.8°C] or greater) cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some persons who have been infected with this virus have also reported diarrhea and vomiting.

What should I do if my child gets sick with an influenza-like illness?

He or she should stay home and **not** go to school or into the community (except to seek medical care or for other necessities) for at least 24 hours after fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine. Most children recover from the flu quickly without treatment, but those with medical conditions (asthma for example) should call a doctor for an evaluation and to receive antiviral medications as soon as possible. As recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), children who are sent to school with an influenza-like illness will be promptly separated from other students and sent home to prevent spread to others.

Do students who were out sick with an influenza-like illness need a note to return to school?

No, but they should stay home for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine. Although they are less infectious after the fever goes away, those students should be instructed to cover his or her nose when coughing or sneezing, and to wash their hands often at school.

Will a school be closed if there are many cases of H1N1 occurring among the students or staff? School closure is not advised by the CDC unless there is a large number of faculty or students absent that interfere with the school’s ability to function on their routine schedule.

What should I do to prepare for H1N1 in my child’s school this year?

Identify an alternate person who can be with your child if he or she gets sick or school closes and you can’t miss work. Provide updated information to your school regarding your emergency contact information.

What can I do to prevent my child from getting H1N1?

Get your child vaccinated with both the seasonal flu and the H1N1 vaccines that will likely become available this fall. Although vaccine protection isn’t 100%, these vaccines can lessen the chances of getting either seasonal flu or H1N1 flu, which will be difficult to tell apart if he or she gets sick. Also, discuss the following general key messages with your child:

- Cover his or her nose and mouth with a tissue (or use their elbow) when coughing or sneezing, and throw the tissue in the trash after using it.
- Wash his or her hands often with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand cleaners, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching his or her eyes, nose or mouth during the day. Try to avoid close contact with other people who look sick.